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"Resist with care the spirit of innovation upon the principles of your Government, however specious the pretext."—WASHINGTON.

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NO. 98.

Speech of Daniel Webster,

AT WASHINGTON CITY, ON THE CENTENNIAL
ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF
WASHINGTON.

I rise, gentlemen, to propose to you the name of that great man, in commemoration of whose birth, and in honor of whose character and services, we have here assembled.

I am sure that I express a sentiment common to every one present when I say, that there is something more than ordinarily solemn and affecting in this occasion.

We are met to testify our regard for him, whose name is intimately blended with whatever belongs most essentially to the prosperity, the liberty, the free institutions, and the renown of our country. That name was of power to rally a nation, in the hour of thick-

troubling public disasters and calamities; that name shone, amid the storm of war, a beacon light, to cheer and guide the country's friends; its flame, too, like a meteor, to repel her foes. That name, in the days of peace, was a loadstone, attracting to itself a whole people's confidence, a whole people's love, and the whole world's respect; that name, descending with all time, spread over the whole earth, and uttered in all the languages belonging to the tribes and races of men, will forever be pronounced with affectionate gratitude by every one in whose breast there shall arise an aspiration for human rights and human liberty.

We perform this grateful duty, gentlemen, at the expiration of a hundred years from his birth, near the place so cherished and beloved by him, where his dust now reposes, and in the capital which bears his own immortal name.

All experience evinces, that human sentiments are strongly affected by associations. The recurrence of anniversaries, or longer periods of time, naturally freshens the recollection, and deepens the impression of events with which they are historically connected. Renowned places, also, have a power to awaken feeling, which all acknowledge. No American can pass by the fields of Bunker Hill, Monmouth, or Camden, as if they were ordinary spots on the earth's surface. Whoever visits them, feels the sentiment of love of country kindling anew, as if the spirit that belonged to the transactions which have rendered these places distinguished still hovered around, with power to move and excite all who in future time may approach them.

But neither of these sources of emotion equals the power with which great moral examples affect the mind. When sublime virtues cease to be abstractions, when they become embodied in human character, and exemplified in human conduct, we should be false to our own nature, if we did not indulge in the spontaneous effusions of our gratitude and our admiration. A true lover of the virtue of patriotism delights to contemplate its purest models; and that love of country may be well suspected which affects to soar so high into the regions of sentiment as to be lost and absorbed in the abstract feeling, and becomes too elevated, or too refined, to glow either with power in the commendation or the love of individual benefactors. All this is immaterial. It is as if one should be so enthusiastic a lover of poetry as to care nothing for Homer or Milton; so passionately attached to eloquence as to be indifferent to Tully and Chatham; or such a devotee to the arts, in such an ecstasy with the elements of beauty, proportion, and expression, as to regard the masterpieces of Raphael and Michael Angelo with coldness or contempt. We may be assured, gentlemen, that he who really loves the thing itself, loves its finest exhibitions. A true friend of his country loves her friends and benefactors, and thinks it no degradation to commend and commemorate them.

The voluntary outpouring of the public feeling, made to-day, from the North to the South, and from the East to the West, proves this sentiment to be both just and natural. In the cities and in the villages, in the public temples and in the family circles, among all ages and sexes, gladdened voices, to-day, bespeak grateful hearts, and a freshened recollection of the virtues of the Father of his Country. And it will be so, in all time to come, so long as public virtue is itself an object of regard. The ingenuous youth of America will hold up to themselves the bright model of Washington's example, and study to be what they behold, they will contemplate his character, till all its virtues spread out and display themselves to their delighted vision, as the earliest astronomers, the shepherds on the plains of Babylon, gazed at the stars till they saw them form into clusters and constellations, overpowering at length the eyes of the beholders with the united blaze of a thousand lights.

Gentlemen, we are at the point of a century from the birth of Washington; what a century it has been! During its course, the human mind has

seemed to proceed with a sort of geometric velocity, accomplishing more than had been done in five or tens of centuries preceding. Washington stands at the commencement of a new era, as well as at the head of the New World. A century from the birth of Washington has changed the world. The country of Washington has been the theatre on which a great part of that change has been wrought; and Washington himself a principal agent by which it has been accomplished. His age and his country are equally full of wonders; and of both he is the chief.

If the prediction of the poet, uttered a few years before his birth, be true; if indeed he be designed by Providence that the proudest exhibition of human character and human affairs shall be made on this theatre of the Western

World, it is he that has made it so. "The first act already past," "A fifth shall close the drama with the day; Time's noblest offspring is the last!"

how could this imposing, swelling, final scene be appropriately opened; how could its intense interest be adequately sustained, but by the introduction of just such a character as our Washington?

Washington had attained his manhood when that spark of liberty was struck out in his own country, which has since kindled into a flame, and shot its beams over the earth. In the flow of a century from his birth, the world has changed in science, in arts, in the extent of commerce, in the improvement of navigation, and in all that relates to the civilization of man. But it is the spirit of human freedom, the new elevation of individual man, in his moral, social, and political character, leading the whole long train of other improvements, which has most remarkably distinguished the era. Society, in this century, has not made its progress, like Chinese skill, by a greater acuteness of ingenuity in trifles; it has not merely lashed itself to an increased speed round the old circles of thought and action; but it has assumed a new character, it has raised itself from beneath Governments to a participation in Governments; it has mixed moral and political objects with the daily pursuits of individual men, and, with a freedom and strength before altogether unknown, it has applied to these objects

the whole power of the human understanding. It has been the era, in short, when the social principle has triumphed over the feudal principle; when society has maintained its rights against military power, and established, in foundations never hereafter to be shaken, its competency to govern itself. It was the extraordinary fortune of Washington, that, having been entrusted in Revolutionary times with the supreme military command, and having fulfilled that trust with equal renown for wisdom and for valor, he should be placed at the head of the first government in which an attempt was to be made, on a large scale, to rear the fabric of social order on the basis of a written constitution, and of a pure representative principle. A Government was to be established, without a throne, without an aristocracy, without castes, orders, or privileges; and this Government, instead of being a democracy, existing and acting within the walls of a single city, was to be extended over a vast country, of different climates, interests, and habits, and of various sects and sentiments of the Christian religion. The experiment certainly was entirely new. A popular Government, of this extent, it was evident, could be framed only by carrying into full effect the principle of representation, or of delegated power; and the world was to see whether society could, by the strength of this principle, maintain its own peace and good government, carry forward its own great interests, and conduct itself to political renown and glory. By the benignity of Providence, this experiment, so full of interest to us and to our posterity forever, so full of interest to the world, in its present generation, and in all its generations to come, was suffered to commence under the guidance of Washington. Destined for this high career, he was fitted for it by his wisdom, by virtue, by patriotism, by discretion, by whatever can inspire confidence in man to ward man. Entering on the untrodden scenes, early disappointment, and the premature extinction of all hope of success, would have been certain, had it not been that there did exist throughout the country, in a most extraordinary degree, an unwavering trust in him whose hand held the helm of office.

I remarked, gentlemen, that the whole world was and is interested in the result of this experiment. And is it not so? Do we deceive ourselves, or is it true, that at this moment the career which this Government is running is among the most attractive objects to the civilized world? Do we deceive ourselves, or is it true, that at this moment that love of liberty and that understanding of its true principles, which are flying over the whole

world, as on the wings of all the winds, are really and truly of American origin?

At the period of the birth of Washington, there existed in Europe no political liberty, in large communities, except the Provinces of Holland, and except that England herself had set a great example, so far as it went, by her glorious Revolution of 1688. Every where else, despotic power was predominant, and the feudal or military principle held the mass of mankind in hopeless bondage. One half of Europe was crushed beneath the Bourbon sceptre, and no exception of political liberty, no hope even of religious toleration, existed among that Nation which was America's first ally. The King was the State, the King was the country, the King was all. There was one King, with power not derived from his people, and no right to be questioned, and the rest were all subjects, with no political right, but obedience. All above was intangible power, all below quiet subjection. A recent occurrence in the French Chambers shows us how human sentiments on these subjects have changed. A Minister had spoken of the "King's subjects." "There are no subjects," exclaimed hundreds of voices, "in a country where the People make the King."

Gentlemen, the spirit of human liberty and of free government, nurtured and grown into strength and beauty in America, has stretched its course into the midst of the Nations. Like an emanation from Heaven, it has gone forth and will not return void. It must change, it is fast changing the face of the earth. Our great, our high duty, is to show in our own example, that this spirit is a spirit of health, as well as a spirit of power; that its benignity is as great as its strength; that its efficiency to secure individual rights, social relations, and moral order, is equal to the irresistible force, with which it prostrates principalities and powers. The world, at this moment, is regarding us with a willing, but something of a fearful admiration. Its deep and awful anxiety is to learn whether free States may be stable, as well as free; whether popular power may be trusted, as well as feared. In short, whether wise, regular, and virtuous self-government, is a vision, for the contemplation of theorists; or a truth, established, illustrated, and brought into practice, in the country of Washington.

Gentlemen, for the earth which we inhabit, and the whole circle of the sun—for all the unborn races of mankind, we seem to hold in our hands, for their weal or woe, the fate of this experiment. If we fail, who shall venture the repetition? If our example shall prove to be one, not of encouragement, but of terror—not fit to be imitated, but fit only to be shunned, where else shall the world look for free models? If this great Western Sun be struck out of the firmament, at what other fountain shall the Lamp of Liberty hereafter be lighted? What other orb shall emit a ray, to glimmer even, on the darkness of the world?

Gentlemen, there is no danger of our overrating or overstating the important part which we are now acting, in human affairs. It should not flatter our personal self-respect, but it should reanimate our patriotic virtues, and inspire us with a deeper and more solemn sense both of our privileges and our duties. We cannot wish better for our country, nor for the world, than that the same spirit which influenced Washington may influence all who succeed him; and that that same blessing from above which attended his efforts may also attend theirs.

The principles of Washington's Administration are not left doubtful. They are to be found in the Constitution itself—in the great measures recommended and approved by him—in his speeches to Congress, and in that most interesting paper, his Farewell Address to the People of the U. States. The success of the Government under his Administration is the highest proof of the soundness of their principles. And, after an experience of thirty five years, what is there which an enemy could condemn—what is there which either his friends, or the friends of the country, could wish to have been otherwise? I speak, of course, of great measures and leading principles.

In the first place all his measures were right in intent. He stated the whole basis of his own great character, when he told the country, in the homely phrase of the proverb, that honesty is the best policy. One of the most just and most striking things ever said of him, is, that "he changed mankind's idea of political greatness." To command talent, and to success, the common elements of such greatness, he added a disregard of self, a spotlessness of motive, a steady submission to every public and private duty, which threw far into the shade the whole crowd of vulgar great. The object of his regard was the whole country. No part of it was enough to fill his enlarged patriotism. His love of glory, so far as that

may be supposed to have influenced him at all, spurred every thing short of general approbation. It would have been nothing to him, that his partisans or his favorites outnumbered, or outvoted, or outmanaged, those of other leaders. He had no favorites—he rejected all partisanship, and acting honestly for the universal good, he deserved, what he has so richly enjoyed, the universal love.

His principle was, to act right, and to trust the People for support; his principle it was not, to follow the lead of sinister and selfish ends, and to rely on the little arts of party delusion to obtain public sanction for such a course. Born for his country, and for the world, he did not give up to party what was meant for mankind. The consequence is, that his fame is as durable as his principles, as lasting as truth and virtue themselves. While hundreds whom party excitement, and temporary circumstances, and casual combinations, have raised into transient notoriety, sink again, like their bubbles, bursting and dissolving into the great ocean, Washington's fame is like the rock, which bounds that ocean, and at whose feet its billows are destined to break harmlessly forever.

The maxims upon which Washington conducted our foreign relations were few and simple. The first was, an entire and indisputable impartiality towards foreign States. He adhered to this rule of public conduct, against very strong inducements to depart from it, and when the popularity of the moment seemed to favor such a departure. In the next place, he maintained true dignity, and unsullied honor, in all communications with foreign States. It was among the high duties devolved upon him, to introduce our new Government into the circle of civilized States, and powerful nations. Not arrogant or assuming, with no unbecoming or supercilious bearing, he yet exacted for it, from all others, entire and punctilious respect. He demanded, and he obtained at once, a standing of perfect equality for his country, in the society of nations; nor was there a prince or potentate of his day, whose personal character carried with it, into the intercourse with other States, a greater degree of respect and veneration.

He regarded other nations only, as they stood in natural relations to us. With their internal affairs, their political parties and dissensions, he scrupulously abstained, from all interference; and, on the other hand, he spiritedly repelled all such interference by others with us or our concerns. His sternest rebuke, the most indignant measure of his whole Administration, was aimed against such an attempted interference.

He felt it, as an attempt to wound the national honor, and resented it accordingly. The reiterated admonitions in his Farewell Address, show his deep fears, that foreign influence would insinuate itself into our councils, through the channels of domestic dissension, and obtain a sympathy with our own temporary parties. Against all such dangers, he most earnestly entreats the country to guard itself. He appeals to its patriotism, to its respect, to its own honor, to every consideration connected with its welfare and happiness, to resist, at the very beginning, all tendencies toward such connection of foreign interests, with our own affairs. With a tone of earnestness no where else found, even in his last affectionate farewell advice to his countrymen, he says—"Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence, (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens,) the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake; since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government."

Lastly on the subject of foreign relations, Washington never forgot that we had interests peculiar to ourselves. The primary political concerns of Europe, he saw, did not affect us. We had nothing to do with her balance of power, her family compacts, or her successions to thrones. We were placed in a condition favorable to neutrality, during European wars, and to the enjoyment of all the great advantages of that relation. "Why, then," he asks us, "why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?—Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice?"

Indeed, gentlemen, Washington's Farewell Address is full of truths, important at all times, and particularly deserving consideration at the present. With a sagacity which brought the future before him; he saw and pointed out the dangers that even at this moment most minutely threaten us. I hardly know how a greater favor of that kind could now be done to the community than by a renewed & wide diffusion of that admirable paper, and an earnest invitation to every man in

the country to reperuse and consider it. Its political maxims are invaluable; its exhortation to love of country and to brotherly affection among citizens, touching; & the solemnity with which it urges the observance of moral duties, and impresses the power of religious obligation, gives to it the highest character of truly disinterested, sincere, parental advice.

The domestic policy of Washington found its polestar in the avowed objects of the constitution itself. He sought so to administer that constitution, as to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty. These were objects, interesting, in the highest degree, to the whole country, and his policy embraced the whole country.

Among his earliest and most important duties, was the organization of the Government itself, the choice of his confidential advisers, and the various appointments to office. This duty, so important and delicate, when a whole Government was to be organized, and all its offices for the first time filled, was yet not difficult to him; for he had no sinister ends to accomplish, no clamorous partisans to gratify, no pledges to redeem, no objects to be regarded, but simply the mere honest choice of good men, for the public service.

His own singleness of purpose, his disinterested patriotism, were evinced by the selection of his first Cabinet, and by the manner in which he filled the Courts of Justice, and other places of high trust. He sought for men fit for offices; not for offices which might suit men. Above personal considerations, above local considerations, above party considerations, he felt that he could only discharge the sacred trust which the country had placed in his hands, by a diligent inquiry after real merit, and a conscientious preference of virtue and talent. The whole country was the field of his selection. He explored the whole field, looking for whatever it contained most worthy and distinguished. He was, indeed, most successful, and he deserved success, for the purity of his motives, the liberality of his sentiments, and his enlarged and manly policy.

Washington's Administration established the national credit, made provision for the public debt, and for that patriotic army whose interests and welfare were always so dear to him; and by laws wisely framed, and of admirable effect, raised the commerce and navigation of the country, almost at once, from depression and ruin, to a state of prosperity. Nor were his eyes open to these interests alone. He viewed with equal concern its agriculture and manufactures, and so far as they came within the regular exercise of the powers of this Government, they experienced regard and favor.

It should not be omitted, gentlemen, even in this slight reference to the general measures and general principles of the first President, that he saw and felt the full value and importance of the Judicial Department of the Government. An upright and able administration of the laws, he held to be indispensable to public happiness and public liberty. The temple of justice, in his judgment, was a sacred place, and he would profane and pollute it who should assign any to minister in it, not spotless in character, not incorruptible in integrity, not competent by talent and learning, not fit objects of unhesitating trust.

Among other admonitions, he has left us, in his last communication to his country, an exhortation against the excesses of party spirit. A fire not to be quenched, he yet conjures us not to fan and feed the flame. Undoubtedly gentlemen, it is the greatest danger in our system, and of our time. Undoubtedly, if that system should be overthrown, it will be the work of excessive party spirit, acting on the Government, which is dangerous enough, or acting in Government, which is a thousand times more dangerous—for Government then becomes nothing but organized party; and in the strange vicissitudes of human affairs, it may come at last, perhaps, to exhibit the singular paradox of Government itself being in opposition to its own powers, at war with the very elements of its own existence. Such cases are hopeless. As men may be protected against murder, but cannot be guarded against suicide, so Government may be shielded from the assaults of external foes, but nothing can save it, when it chooses to lay violent hands on itself.

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